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# SOCI 520.01: Contemporary Social Theory

Celia Winkler

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# **Contemporary Theory**

## **Sociology 520**

### **Fall 2018**

#### **Instructor Information**

Celia Winkler, Ph.D., J.D.  
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Office Hours: T,Th 1:00 to 1:50, W 2-2:50, and by appointment

#### **Course Summary**

This course introduces graduate students and upper-level undergraduates to the study of some of the theories currently in use in U.S. sociology. The goal of this course is to enable students to become theorists or, at the least, to understand and competently use social theory in their research and their daily lives. As a survey of theoretical perspectives, it is necessarily a little fragmented because the state of theory is fragmented and often marked by deep rifts between camps. Furthermore, there is no neat chronological mapping of theoretical development, as theorists often reach back in time to bring old theories into the present and offer reinterpretations of the “classics.” Thus, to examine theory by simply following a timeline is to misunderstand the use and nature of theory.

My take on theory is that each tradition has something to offer, and the best theory is often a blend of traditions. In order to understand and make theory, however, you must first learn to distinguish among the various perspectives. Due to the short time we have together, it is unreasonable to try to cover all aspects of contemporary theory. We will try to introduce you to the basics of several theories, with application to substantive areas of interest to you.

As advanced undergraduates and graduate students, it is expected that you will take responsibility for your own learning. One doesn't really learn until one tries to teach. Furthermore, theory is something that one learns best by doing. Like any new skill, mastering it requires exercise. This course will require considerable reading, considerable outside work, and a lot of initiative.

#### **Course Goals**

- ❖ Learn the basic outlines of several of the theories currently used by sociologists;
- ❖ Distinguish between different theorists in similar perspectives;
- ❖ Understand differences and similarities among divergent perspectives;
- ❖ Begin to see the application of theory to concrete social situations;
- ❖ Move toward becoming a theorist.

#### **Course Requirements**

- ❖ Regularly check your university email account and Moodle;
- ❖ Read all the assignments, preferably at least a few days before class so that you have time to think and write about it in your journal;
- ❖ Attend all class sessions unless illness or emergency makes this impossible, and participate in class discussion;
- ❖ Organize and lead one class session;
- ❖ Write three short essays (3 to 5 pages) addressing the question posed;
- ❖ Write a longish literature review (approximately 8-10 pages for undergraduates, 15-20 pages for graduate students) comparing and critiquing two of the theoretical approaches we address in class, using ASA format.
- ❖ Record your intellectual journey in your journal.

## **Required Reading:**

American Sociological Association. 2010. *ASA Style Guide*, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition.

Williams, Joseph and Gregory G. Colomb. 2010. *Style: The Basics of Clarity and Grace*. 4<sup>th</sup> Edition. NYC:

Longman Press.

And articles on Moodle.

You may decide that a textbook would be helpful. I recommend Adams & Sydnie, *Contemporary Sociological Theory*.

I may periodically add articles or other materials that I think will be of interest to you.

## **About Class Facilitation:**

Each student will facilitate one class session. You may choose to do this with a partner; in that case, you will co-lead two sessions. This is the part of the course you will always remember (if you remember anything at all). You may be as creative as you wish. It's up to you. Please feel free to consult with me in advance if you have problems with the assignment. You are graded on how seriously you take your task (but this is not to exclude humor; humor is always nice).

## **About the Essays:**

These should be about 5 pages in length. A score of twenty will be exceedingly difficult to attain. You will be required to address a general topic using at least two of the original source readings from different weeks. If you decide you do not like the essay question, you may rewrite it, but post the rewritten question at the beginning of the essay.

## **About the Paper:**

You will pose a question and discuss the relevant literature at length in your paper, centering on a critique of **two or more of the theories we examined in class**. In fact, you might expand on one or more of your short essays. You will submit a paper proposal, after we have gone over them in class through a peer review process.

An annotated bibliography, using ASA citation format and the article summary format provided will cover a minimum of ten peer-reviewed works or chapters (from separate books).

The paper **MUST** show that you have read and analyzed original material from each of your theorists. Secondary works are permissible, but the original is required.

You may submit a rough draft, for which you will be given a provisional grade (that is, the grade you would get if you did no more work). If you want comments on your final paper, you must submit a self-addressed manila envelope with the paper. It may be a good idea to form a writing support group.

## **About the Journal:**

This could simply be your notes with reflections on the readings. The purpose of this is to ensure that you are closely attending to the reading and the class discussions. Do not worry about format, etc. The point here is to engage with the material. You may ask for feedback on occasion during the semester to ensure that you are "doing it right."

## **About the Presentation:**

Please do not see the presentation as a horrendous, terribly scary task, but as an opportunity to present your work to the class for discussion, comments, and so forth. Others may have suggestions on how to improve your paper.

**Timeliness:**

...is of the essence. Assignments will lose a full grade for each day they are late. Only in the most dire of circumstances will I accept late work without assigning a penalty. Last-minute computer/prINTER failure will not be an acceptable excuse. If you need to turn a paper in late, check with me.

**Participation/Attendance:**

Attendance will be taken. For each class you miss, without good cause submitted by email or in writing, you will lose ten points.

|                               |     |
|-------------------------------|-----|
| Essays 3 @ 20 points each     | 60  |
| Paper Problem                 | 5   |
| Article Summaries             | 10  |
| Final Paper                   | 100 |
| Journal                       | 15  |
| Facilitation of class session | 50  |
| Participation                 | 50  |
| Presentation                  | 10  |
| Total                         | 300 |

+/- Grading will be used

## Contemporary Theory

### Sociology 520 \* Fall 2018 Calendar

#### **Week 1: August 29**

**Topic:** Introductions.

**Topic:** What is theory? The Canon

**In-class assignment (20 minutes):** Write a two to three page essay on the sociological theorists you have studied so far, playing special attention to the DWMs (Durkheim, Weber, Marx): nature of classes, "value-free" sociology, positivism, the scientific method...  
(This essay will not be "graded," but will become part of your journal.)

**Topic:** Sociology as Science? Or something else?

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#### **Week 2: September 5**

##### **Topics:**

Choosing class facilitators

What is classical theory?

Consensus and Conflict

##### **Required Reading: What is classical sociological theory?**

Connell, R. W. 1997. "Why Is Classical Theory Classical?" *American Journal of Sociology* 102(6):1511-1557.

Feagin, Joe R., and Hernan Vera. 2008. *Liberation sociology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. Boulder: Paradigm Publishers.

"Improving Human Societies: Reassessing the Classical Theorists"

"U.S. Sociology from the 1890s to 1970s"

##### **Required Reading: Consensus and Conflict**

Merton, Robert King, and Piotr Sztompka. 1996. Chapters in *On social structure and science*. Chicago:

University of Chicago Press. "Paradigm for Functional Analysis in Sociology." (57-62)

----- 1996 [] "Social Structure and Anomie" (132-151)

Parsons, Talcott, and Platt Gerald M. 1970. "Age, Social Structure, and Socialization in Higher Education." *Sociology of Education* 43 (1): 1-37.

##### **Recommended:**

Featherstone, Richard. 2003. "Anomie and strain: Context and consequences of Merton's two theories." *Sociological Inquiry* 73(4):471-489.

Merton, Robert King, and Piotr Sztompka. 1996. *On social structure and science*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

"On Sociological Theories of the Middle Range"

"Manifest and Latent Functions"

Young, William H., and Nancy K. Young. 2004. *The 1950s*. Westport, Conn: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2004. eBook Collection (EBSCOhost), EBSCOhost(accessed August 8, 2017).

##### **Assignment:**

Journal

**Essay 1:** How were functionalism and positivism creatures of their time? Drawing on Connell's essay, locate Parsons and Merton in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, with relation to power, conflict/consensus, social structure, and ideology. What was going on then, and how did the theories respond to the issues of the time? Due on Moodle Monday, September 17, 11:55 p.m.

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### **Week 3: September 12**

**Topics:** Ideology and the critique of positivism

Neomaxism: Lukacs, Gramsci, and Horkheimer

**Required Reading:**

Lukacs, "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat" in *History and Class Consciousness*

Morera, Esteve. "Gramsci and Democracy." *Canadian Journal of Political Science / Revue Canadienne De Science Politique* 23, no. 1 (1990): 23-37.

Horkheimer, Max. 1989. "Tasks of an Institute for Social Research." Pp. 25-36 in Bronner, Stephen Eric and Douglas MacKay Kellner, eds. 1989. *Critical Theory and Society: A Reader*. London: Routledge.

**Recommended Reading:**

Ollman, Bertel. *Alienation*, pp. 131-157

Avineri, Shlomo. 1971. *The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx*, Chapter 3, "Homo Faber"; Chapter 4, "Alienation and Property"; Chapter 5 "Praxis and Revolution." Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Cutrone, Chris. 2014. "Why still read Lukács? The place of 'philosophical' questions in Marxism." *Platypus Review* 43. <http://platypus1917.org/2014/02/01/why-still-read-lukacs-the-place-of-philosophical-questions-in-marxism/> Retrieved 9 August 2017.

**Assignments:**

Journal

Paper Problem Statement – bring hard copy to class

**In-class Activity:**

Peer review of Paper Problem Statement

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### **Week 4: September 19**

**Topic:** Neomaxism--Critical Theory and the response to Fascism –Horkheimer, Adorno, and Habermas  
**Facilitator:**

**Required Reading:**

Arato, Andrew, and Eike Gebhardt. 2000. *The Essential Frankfurt school reader*. New York: Continuum.

Horkheimer, "Tasks of an Institute for Social Research"

Adorno, "Introduction to the Authoritarian Personality"

Roiser, Martin and Carla Willig. 2002. "The strange death of the authoritarian personality: 50 years of psychological and political debate." *History of the Human Sciences* 15(4):71-96.

Held, David. 1980. *Introduction to critical theory: Horkheimer to Habermas*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Chapters 9 & 10, "Introduction to Habermas" and "Discourse, Science and Society"

**Assignments:**

Journal

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### **Week 5: September 26**

**Topic:** Neomaxism – The response to capitalism and neoliberalism

**Facilitator:**

**Required Reading:**

- O'Hara, Phillip A. 2004. "Veblen and Sweezy on Monopoly Capital, Crises, Conflict, and the State." *Journal of Economic Issues* 38(4):969-987.
- Harvey, David. 2007. "Neoliberalism as Creative Destruction." *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 610(1):22-44.
- Block, Fred and Margaret Somers. 2014. *The Power of Market Fundamentalism: Karl Polanyi's Critique*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. Chapter 1.
- Acker, Joan. 1988. "Class, Gender, and the Relations of Distribution." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 13(3): 473 - 497

**Recommended Reading:**

- Somers, Margaret and Fred Block. 2014. "The Return of Karl Polanyi." *Dissent* 61(2): 30-33.
- Hartmann, Heidi. 1979. "The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism." *Capital & Class* 3(2):1-33.

**Assignments:**

Journal

Essay 2: Compare and contrast the different approaches to modern Marxian theory. In answering this question, weigh their relative utility in different contexts. First, address the context in which the author is writing. Next, choose one of these theories, and build on it to apply to a contemporary situation. *Due Monday, October 8 at 11:55 p.m.*

Paper problem to instructor, due on Moodle Tuesday, October 9 at 11:55 p.m.

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**Week 6: October 3**

**Topic:** Symbolic Interaction--Blumer and Goffman

**Required Reading:**

- Blumer, Herbert. 1969. *Symbolic Interactionism: Perspective and Method*. Berkeley: UC Press., Chapter 1.
- Goffman, Erving. TBD
- Goffman, Erving. 1976. "The Arrangement Between the Sexes." *Theory and Society* 4(3): 3-1-331.
- West, Candace, and Zimmerman Don H. "Doing Gender." *Gender and Society* 1, no. 2 (1987): 125-51.

**Recommended Listening:**

Learning to Be Black: ['Americanah' Author Explains 'Learning' To Be Black In The U.S., June 23, 2013](#)

**Assignment:**

Journal

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**Week 7: October 10**

**Topic:** Symbolic Interaction: Framing

**Facilitator:**

**Required Reading:**

- Benford, Robert D. and David A. Snow. 2000. "Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment." *Annual Review of Sociology* 26(1):611-639.
- Ferree, Myra M. 2003. "Resonance and Radicalism: Feminist Framing in the Abortion Debates of the United States and Germany." *American Journal of Sociology* 109(2):304-344.
- Blue, Gwendolyn. 2015. "Framing Climate Change for Public Deliberation: What Role for Interpretive Social Sciences and Humanities?" *Journal of Environmental Policy & Planning* 2015: 1-18.

**Assignment:** Journal

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**Week 8: October 17**

**Topic:** Phenomenology and Social Construction – Berger & Luckmann

**Required Reading:**

Schutz, Alfred. 2002. "Alfred Schutz on Society and Intersubjectivity." Pp. 143-168 in *Self, Symbols, and Society: Classic Readings in Social Psychology*, edited by Nathan Rousseau. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, Publishers.

Berger, Peter and Thomas Luckmann. 2002. "Peter Bergman and Thomas Luckmann on the Social Construction of Self and Society." Pp. 230-248 in *Self, Symbols, and Society: Classic Readings in Social Psychology*, edited by Nathan Rousseau. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, Publishers.

**Assignment:** Journal

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**Week 9: October 24**

**Topic:** Social Construction – Intersectionality and Standpoint

**Facilitator:**

**Required Reading:**

Smith, Dorothy. 1992. "Sociology from Women's Experience: A Reaffirmation." *Sociological Theory* 10(1): 88-98.

Collins, Patricia Hill. 1989. "The Social Construction of Black Feminist Thought." *Signs* 14 (4): 745-773.

Crenshaw, Kimberle. 1991. "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color." *Stanford Law Review* 43(6): 1241-1299.

Choo, Hae Yeon, and Ferree Myra Marx. 2010. "Practicing Intersectionality in Sociological Research: A Critical Analysis of Inclusions, Interactions, and Institutions in the Study of Inequalities." *Sociological Theory* 28: 129-49

**Assignment:**

Journal

Article Summaries, Due on Moodle Friday, November 2, 11:55 p.m.

Essay 3: Compare and contrast symbolic interaction and social construction. What do they add to sociology that might have been missing in the theoretical perspectives we've studied to date? What are the weaknesses/strengths in each perspective? How can the weaknesses be addressed? Due on Moodle Monday, November 5, 11:55 p.m.

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**Week 10: October 31**

**Topic:** Poststructuralism – Foucault – Power/Knowledge

**Required Reading**

Foucault, Michel. 1970. *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (Introduction). *Social Science Information* 9(1):175-185.

-----, 1982. "The Subject and Power." *Critical Inquiry* 8(4):777-795.

**Assignment:**

Journal

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**Week 11: November 7**

**Topic:** Poststructuralism – Foucault--Panopticon

**Facilitator:**

**Required Reading:**

Foucault panopticon



-----, 2009. "Alternatives to the Prison: Dissemination or Decline of Social Control?" *Theory, Culture & Society* 26(6):12-24.

Heyes, Cressida J. 2006. "Foucault Goes to Weight Watchers." *Hypatia* 21(2): 126-149.

Assignment: Journal

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**Week 12: November 14**  
**TBA**

**Assignment:** Journal

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**Week 13: November 21 Thanksgiving Travel Day – No Class**

**Week 14: November 28**

**Topic:** Presentations

**Assignment:** Journal

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**Week 15: December 5**

Study Day

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**Finals week:**

Paper and Journal due no later than Wednesday, December 12, 5 p.m. Journal may be placed in my box or submitted electronically on Moodle, and paper is submitted either on Moodle or by email.